

“Workplace Falls: Don’t Fall Behind in Your Training”

Why It Matters:

- In the most recent year for which statistics are available, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported 777 fatal falls in private industry and 255,600 nonfatal falls.
- Slips, trips, and falls are estimated to account for at least 15 percent of all job-related deaths.
- The average direct cost for a single disabling injury hovers near \$30,000, with indirect costs significantly higher, according to research conducted at the University of Florida.
- Although construction workers accounted for a little more than half of all workplace falls, that still leaves a large number of fall-related accidents that occur in everyday workplace situations.

Take aim at slip and trip hazards. Slips and trips are major causes of workplace falls and injuries. And one of the biggest contributing factors to slips, trips, and resulting falls is improper housekeeping. Lighting can also be a factor, especially when employees move from light to dark, or dark to light areas of the workplace. Slips, trips, and falls can also occur when workers are carrying large objects that obscure their vision. Other causes include:

- Not watching where you’re going
- Spills and wet floors
- Clutter on stairs or walkways
- Uneven, defective flooring, worn stairs, or worn spots in carpets
- Wearing sunglasses in low-light areas
- Failure to use handrails
- Failure to use common sense

Slips are caused by too little friction between your feet and the surface you walk or work on. The loss of traction leads to a loss of balance for the employee. Follow these safety suggestions to avoid slips:

- Clean up spills or grease promptly.
- Ensure that proper methods are used in floor maintenance (avoid floor wax buildup).
- Wear the right shoes or boots to increase traction on the work surface.
- Slow down and pay attention to where you are walking.

Trips occur whenever your foot hits an object and you are moving with enough momentum to be thrown off balance. Remember these rules to avoid tripping:

- Make sure you can see where you are going. Carry only loads that you can see over.
- Keep work areas well lighted or use a flashlight.
- Keep work areas clean and don’t allow materials to be stored in aisles or on stairs.
- Arrange furniture to ensure safe pedestrian traffic.
- Report dangerous tripping hazards in walkways, such as extension cords, loose carpeting, loose floor tiles, or broken pavement.

Most **falls** are slips or trips at ground level, but falls from greater heights pose a much higher risk of serious injury. Avoid falls of any kind with these safety measures:

- Don’t jump, instead lower yourself down from docks, trucks, or work surfaces.
- Repair or replace stairs or handrails that are loose or broken.
- Avoid high heels or platform shoes.
- Use the proper ladder for the job. Don’t overreach and don’t use the top of a ladder.
- Use and maintain scaffolds properly.
- Use the appropriate personal fall protection devices for the situation.

Focus on eliminating falls from ladders. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) classifies ladder accidents in to one of three broad categories: (1) accidents in which the wrong ladder is used, (2) accidents in which a ladder fails because it is in poor condition, and (3) accidents in which the ladder is used improperly. Of 1,400 ladder accidents in a BLS study, it was found that:

- 57% of fall victims were holding objects with one or both hands while climbing or descending the ladder.
- 30% had wet, greasy, or oily shoes.
- 53% of straight ladders had not been secured or braced at the bottom, and 61% had not been secured at the top.
- 66% of the fall victims had never been trained in how to inspect ladders for defects before using them.
- 73% had not been provided written instructions on the safe use of ladders.

Make sure employees know when fall arrest equipment is required – and how to use it correctly. OSHA's fall protection standard identifies situations in which fall protection is required as those in which employees work 6 feet or more above the ground on:

- Walking ramps and runways
- Unprotected leading edges of floors, roofs, floor formworks, and other surfaces not actively and continuously under construction
- Faces of formwork or reinforcing steel
- Hoist areas
- Areas above holes, including skylights
- Edges of excavations
- Roofs of various pitches
- Precast concrete structural members that are being put up
- Areas where overland bricklaying and related work are performed
- Residential construction
- Wall openings
- Areas above equipment, such as machinery, electrical equipment, degreasing units, or anything that could create a hazards if an employees fell in or on it

Remember to work at working safely. You might not be able to change where you work, but you can recognize dangers and work at eliminating hazards; use safety devices and equipment, and take precautions on the job.

